

Lead Pastor's Report 2016

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." --Matthew 5:13--16

Let us pray:

Light of the world, be our light today.

Creator of life, preserve our life this day.

Holy God, pour out your righteousness on this day.

Light of the world, we praise you with our hearts, songs, and minds. Amen.

Beloved –

Salt, Light and Sanctuary – that just rolls off the tongue. In the Gospel lesson for this day,¹ which comes from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we are salt and light as we seek to live as God's people in the world. Holy Mackerel, has that been true for Sanctuary UCC in this past year! With the Spirit's help, we have offered our resources, extended our gifts and our talents to be the hands and feet of Jesus, we have flavored the community with our special Sanctuary seasoning, we plopped our Christ Light right smack dab in the middle of the City Square. As we have been living into this call to be salt and light and sanctuary in the city – we have extended the reach of God's love and grace and made God's love and justice real. Praise the Lord.

Salt and Light and Sanctuary! At this very moment we are salt—cleansing, preserving, adding flavor. At this very moment we are light—revealing what is hidden, allowing all to see. This is really good news—for God's reign is not only a future promise; it also is present reality. Yes, this is really good news—for Sanctuary UCC is not just an experiment or a future promise, something to be built, something that will come if we do all the right things, but Sanctuary is a present reality. We participate in God's beloved community, God's blessed reign as we live in God's ways, as we follow Jesus on the Way. We create sanctuary and participate in God's reign as we spread love through circles of care, as we worship and sing, as we raise revenue through fundraisers and stewardship, as we meet for business meetings, as we march and protest and work for justice, and as we stand outside in the city square praying for and spreading ashes on the foreheads of everyone who will allow.

The Annual Reports submitted for your consideration detail the projects, programs, ministries and faith formation in which Sanctuary has been engaged. Those reports are really inspiring because

¹ *Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/Year A; February 5, 2017*

we have accomplished a huge amount of being salt and light and sanctuary in Medford, Cambridge and Boston; on Pine Ridge and at Standing Rock; and through our financial commitment to the United Church of Christ, in other parts of the world. It is phenomenal what we have been able to do with such a small congregation.

I hope you will take the time to read the details about how we have been salty with our neighbors at Medford Overcoming Addiction, Outdoor Church, Bread of Life, Shortstop, AM2PM, the Gay Straight Alliance, the Black Student Union, The Africana House, Gay Pride, Butterfly Music Transgender Chorus, Lakota YouthStay and ReMember. I also hope you will read the details about how we have been shedding and spreading light through faith formation, community activism and our engagement with social justice issues. Here are just a few examples: faith-formation for the postmodern seeker through our collaborative and unique worship, study groups and arts and inspiration programs; community activism through leadership in the West Medford Chamber of Commerce (Halloween Block Party, Holiday Tree Lighting), Medford Interfaith Clergy, Medford Conversations Project, Medford Health Matters, and Interfaith Worship like the Blessing of the Animals, and Vigils; and social and environmental justice issues (Black Lives Matter, Native American, Sanctuary Movement, Water Protectors at Standing Rock).

So thank you for all the ways that you are “being salt, being light and being sanctuary” – in your homes, your jobs, your neighborhoods, your retirement, your volunteer activities, your relationships and here in your worship, study and service Sanctuary UCC. Thank you for trusting our triune God to help us experiment and create, to forgive us our shortcomings and to guide us forward to be what none has been before. And thank you for trusting me and the wonderful staff team that we have built. Rev. Lambert Rahming our Community Minister is connecting sanctuary cross-culturally and leading our plan to build out volunteerism. Ms. Linda Malik, Church Administrator and Manager is a community organizer herself and is not only building systems to manage our work, but helping us (especially me) to learn how to be sanctuary through partnerships and collaboration; Ramon (Ray) Santiago, our Sexton cares for our space and prepares for our events with love for what we are doing and a commitment to our comfort and a welcoming environment for our guests; and finally, our beloved Clarisse Coughlin, who has been Interning with us this year is helping with data base management, press engagement, and will help lead and administer the Circles of Care pilot we are building this season.

Thank you for allowing us to be your staff and envision our ministries and direction; to build and encourage our programs; to drive and steer the plane while we are flying it; to support all of us in living out the heart of our faith; and to inspire and care for you and our community as preachers, chaplains, community leaders, change agents, justice seekers and pot stirrers!

We have followed Jesus into the streets—as we hoped to when we left our institutional/church building based model of ministry—and we have been salt and light and sanctuary in ways that are beginning to really take hold. I see evidence of this every day in most every interaction as I

represent you in Medford and beyond. People in the city have begun to understand what we are trying to do and they are responding positively. Sanctuary is poised to take the next step toward sustainability—through broadening partnerships, extending our “sanctuary-to-go” model and leaning into the ministries and models that are showing signs of financial self-support and fruitfulness.

So here are some things (from the past couple of weeks) that inspire me to lean in! Our overall financial position is solid both now and for the next four years. Many in Medford are excited about what we are doing and we are continuing to make significant impact in our community through partnerships and collaborations. People are dropping in to see what we are doing. People are calling and emailing and telling us how much they appreciate what we are doing. The Lakota YouthStay is magnetic—people are reaching out to Joy to find out how they can help, the host families are in place and 15 youth have applied for the first summer. We just received notice that we got three grants for Arts and Inspiration programs for this coming year from the Medford Art Council (\$2650). Artists are calling us in order to be considered for the Gallery. Ten people invested twelve hours and were inspired by LDI’s community organizing training in order to make our vision of spreading love and care a reality. That team is energized to make the pilot program a reality and with our staff have begun to implement that plan. Fifty people showed up for Adele Travisano’s art reception and twenty-five for her ARTChurch. We have solidified partnerships with Medford High School and Tufts University through Lambert’s and my relationships there. Both pastors were in leadership of Medford Conversations and the feedback is nothing but positive about that effort. We are working with community members to discuss Medford becoming a sanctuary city. I have recently become the president of Medford Health Matters and am spearheading a proposal to reframe that organization’s work to become a citywide coalition building body – with a hired staff person to do the organizing. Both pastors have been asked by the Mayor to participate in civic events.

The ministry model is taking hold and we are making a big difference in Medford. We are poised to ask people outside of the church to support us financially and we will begin that effort immediately—seeking new and renewable revenue sources through fundraisers, grants, friends, and you. As we lean into this new way of being church and those ministries that have been successful, we cannot rest. We must continue to experiment and discover how we will grow and broaden our worship, our stewardship and our ministries to become sustainable and self-supporting. Our challenge for 2017 is to figure out how to be salt and light and sanctuary in a postmodern, post-denomination, multicultural world at the same time that we are figuring out how to pay for it!

I am so glad that we will be doing that together—with our Co-Creator God, our Brother Jesus and with the everyday guidance of the Holy Spirit. May it be so.

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade